

Spurs go third

AFP, London



A blunder by Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard helped Tottenham grab a 1-1 draw against Everton and move up to third place in the Premier League standings here Saturday.

Everton, buoyed by their victory over Liverpool in the Merseyside derby last week, got off to a dream start after 17 minutes when Leighton Baines curled in a superb 25-yard free-kick to silence the White Hart Lane crowd.

But Spurs drew level almost immediately after a dreadful gaffe from Howard that was the stuff of nightmares for the American international shot-stopper.

There appeared to be little danger when Spurs fullback Alan Hutton swung in an innocuous-looking cross from the right.

Howard advanced off his line but instead of punching to safety could only graze the ball onto Peter Crouch, who guided back across the face of goal for in-form Dutchman Rafael van der Vaart who hammered home the equaliser.

Yet despite enjoying plenty of possession for

the remainder of the game, Harry Redknapp's men were unable to penetrate a well-organised Everton line-up.

Gareth Bale, the hat-trick hero of Spurs 4-3 Champions League defeat against Inter Milan in midweek, clearly appeared to be suffering a European hangover, anonymous for long periods of the game.

The aerial threat of Crouch caused sporadic flutters in the Everton defence, and the tall striker had appeals for a penalty turned down midway through the first half when he was sandwiched by Phil Neville and Phil Jagielka.

Crouch also squandered a glorious opportunity to put Tottenham ahead on the stroke of half-time after being picked out by a wicked Hutton cross, only to direct his header straight into the arms of Howard.

The England international should have done better with a 70th-minute effort following a promising Spurs counter-attack but once again failed to test Howard, shooting tamely at the Everton keeper.

The draw saw Spurs leapfrog into third above Arsenal and Manchester United, who both play on Sunday. Everton moved up two positions to ninth.

Milan face tricky trip

AFP, Rome



AC Milan face the tricky trip south to Naples on Monday looking to prove they have learnt their lessons from their Champions League chastisement in Madrid.

Milan were well beaten in a 2-0 reverse against Jose Mourinho's Real on Tuesday with coach Massimiliano Allegri claiming his team played as if it were a friendly.

The rossoneri sit second in Serie A, two points behind surprise early leaders Lazio and goals scored ahead of city rivals Inter Milan.

Napoli are fourth, just a couple of points behind the Milan teams.

But they too were disappointing in their 0-0 Europa League draw with a severely weakened Liverpool on Thursday.

Napoli took a long time to pose any threat to Liverpool and only really created two or three chances in the whole game, although the English did not better.

Still, Napoli are usually a tough prospect at home and last season staged a remarkable injury time comeback from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 with Milan.

And the visitor's vice-president Adriano Galliani is adamant Milan must improve from Tuesday's showing.

"It's not that we must forget Madrid, we lost a game but it's not a drama," he said.

"We need to do better but the main thing to forget is the first few minutes which shocked us because when you concede two goals in two minutes you risk an avalanche.

"In that moment I was afraid it would finish five or six nil. But then little by little we recovered, we had the chance to pull one back through Ibra (Zlatan Ibrahimovic) and had he scored that could have opened the way for an

equaliser.

"We saw what happened at the San Siro with Tottenham down to 10 men against 11 and scored three goals, including two in two minutes.

"Football is very strange. Last year I left after 90 minutes with us leading 2-0 with, if I'm not mistaken, four minutes of injury time to come.

"I left with it 2-0 only to later find out it finished 2-2."

With Napoli realistically aiming to qualify for the Champions League this season, Galliani knows this game is important, but he shied away from putting too much emphasis on what will be only their eighth match of this campaign.

"It is vital, yes but let's not call every game vital otherwise everyone of 38 league games and all the Champions League and Cup games are also vital," he added.

"We're at the eighth game of the season, we're playing Napoli who are fourth and doing very well.

"It's a difficult match, we know that, but we need to be leading on May 22, 2011, after 38 games.

"This Napoli game is certainly important but we're playing every three days and we're ready."

Following their efforts against Liverpool, Napoli will be hard pushed to match the high standards they have mostly displayed this season.

And coach Walter Mazzari admitted as much following the draw with the Reds.

"Don't forget that we're a young team and that many of our lads aren't used to European competition, nor playing every three days," he said.

"This adventure needs to be seen as a great opportunity to improve."

If Napoli are to seriously threaten the upper echelons of Serie A this season, they will have to learn those lessons quickly.



PHOTO: AFP

Hamburg midfielder Piotr Trochowski fails to score past Bayern Munich goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt (L) during their Bundesliga clash in Hamburg on Friday.

Bayern fire blanks

AFP, Hamburg



Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal admitted he was disappointed with the Bundesliga champions' goalless draw in Hamburg, but insisted his side 'gave everything they had'.

Bayern are up to ninth in the table after Friday night's draw, but remain nine points behind leaders Dortmund who host Hoffenheim on Sunday.

German giants Bayern were seeking a first win in Hamburg for five years but they settled for a point without captain Mark van Bommel, defender Daniel van Buyten, striker Miroslav Klose, plus playmakers Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery.

"I went to the dressing room after the game and told my players it's a shame we didn't win," admitted Dutchman van Gaal.

"I have the feeling we could have come away with a lot more than that."

"Hamburg were physically shattered in the last 15 minutes, which is basically when we should have been scoring the single goal we needed."

"We failed, and we could even have lost it as well."

"My lads are giving everything they've got in the effort to win, as we saw again. I'm very pleased with our passionate approach."

"But I'm unhappy about us not scoring the one goal. We had the chance, because Hamburg

were exhausted."

Hamburg could have taken all three points right at the end of the game when Burkino Faso midfielder Jonathan Pitroipa beat the defence and curved his shot around Bayern goalkeeper Hans-Joerg Butt, but his effort hit the post.

"Obviously, we wanted to come away with the three points, but Hamburg had a huge chance to win it at the end, so we have to be satisfied with a point," said Munich captain Philipp Lahm.

"After all, HSV aren't just any old team. Overall it was a reasonable performance, but we need more determination and precision in the final third."

With his side fourth in the table before Saturday and Sunday's matches, Hamburg coach Armin Veh said he was happy to take a point off Munich.

"Bayern were missing a few players today, but they still boast enormous quality," said Veh.

"It means you can't spend the last 20 minutes throwing everyone forward, you have to make sure you're not hit on the break."

Hamburg captain and Germany defender Heiko Westermann rued his side's missed opportunities, especially Pitroipa's effort which had home fans clutching their heads in agony as his golden chance went begging.

"We had the better chances and could have won the game," said Westermann.

"It's a real shame Pitroipa didn't score, and (Piotr) Trochowski was in a one-on-one with the keeper too. But one point is better than none."



PHOTO: AFP

Everton midfielder Diniyar Bilyaletdinov (L) fights for the ball with Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Wilson Palacios during their Premier League encounter at White Hart Lane yesterday.

Ade commits to Man City

AFP, London

Togo striker Emmanuel Adebayor has said he is determined to battle on for his place at Manchester City despite admitting that he has had strong words with manager Roberto Mancini.

The 26-year-old was on top form in midweek scoring all of his side's goals as they beat Lech Poznan 3-1 at home in the Europa League, but that was a rare start for him as he is more used to being on the bench.

That has led to suggestions he could be on his way out in January, but Adebayor told The Sun newspaper: "I am committed to the club and the fight to win things and the fans should know that."

Reports have circulated in the past of rows between Adebayor and his manager.

And the striker, who joined City from Arsenal last year, confirmed: "I have had a row with the manager and so has Carlos Tevez. The reason we row is we are all so passionate."

"We just want to be part of a successful club."

"It's not about money or egos. It's because we all want what is best for the team. These disagreements show we care."

"We have a shout, then get on with it. I think it's good. It shows we are hungry for success."

"It has been a difficult season for me. But I have never regretted my decision to come to City and will keep fighting for my chance."

Benzema stays confident

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema is confident he will get the chance to shine at the Spanish giants and has dismissed reports that he does not get along with new coach Jose Mourinho.

"I am working hard to earn more playing time. Once I play people will see what I am capable of. I am sure I will succeed with Real Madrid. I don't have a single doubt," he said in comments published Friday on Real's website.

"If I have to defend and run, I will. That is fine. I will work harder to play more and to prove to everyone that I am a good forward that can score a lot of goals and play pretty football."

"Mourinho is a great coach and he has faith in me. He has told me that I need to run more. What I like most about him is that he is daring. He is one of the best coaches I have had," he added.

Benzema has struggled to establish himself at Real since his big-money move from Lyon in 2009, scoring just eight goals in his first league campaign and netting only once so far this term.

He has made six appearances for Real in the Spanish league this season, playing for a total of 177 minutes, of which 71 minutes were as a starter.

Test of title credentials

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City have a golden opportunity to prove their credentials as contenders for the Premier League on Sunday when they host title rivals Arsenal.

For a brief period this week it appeared Wayne Rooney was willing to consider joining City after the Manchester United striker signalled his intention to leave Old Trafford.

City fans were drooling at the prospect of signing their rivals' star player but the saga came to an abrupt conclusion when Rooney opted to sign a few five-year contract with United.

Even without Rooney, City should be title challengers this term as Roberto Mancini's side are currently just two points behind leaders Chelsea, who face Wolver 24 hours before Arsenal visit Eastlands.

Depending on the outcome of events at Stamford Bridge, Mancini's team will take on Arsene Wenger's side knowing victory could take them top or, at the very least, open up a six point gap between themselves and the Gunners.

The campaign may still be in its infancy, but City's season has steadily gathered momentum and having beaten Chelsea

last month, another win against one of their principal rivals would send out a telling message that Mancini's expensively acquired squad mean business.

Key to victory will be the form of David Silva, who produced an impressive display in the midweek Europa League win over Lech Poznan and is beginning to show signs of the form that persuaded Mancini to sign the Spain winger from Valencia.

However, Silva is under no illusions about the threat posed by Arsenal and his compatriot Cesc Fabregas.

"Arsenal play very good football, they have young players with a great desire to play," Silva said.

"They are a threat, no doubt about that - they will be fighting for the title with Manchester United, Chelsea and of course, Manchester City."

"But if we win, we will be six points ahead of them. That's a good distance at this stage of the season, and also it would keep the pressure on Chelsea."

"Cesc and I get on very well, we are good friends. We played together in the Under-17 team for Spain and from then on we have been close."

"We talk and text each other. But I won't be sending him any texts before the game, because I don't want to tempt fate - and I hope that I will be passing on my sympathy to him afterwards!"

Emmanuel Adebayor struck a hat-trick against Lech Poznan and is eager to face his former side having scored in the corresponding fixture last season.

Adebayor's reaction - he ran the length of the pitch to celebrate in front of the Arsenal fans - drew heavy criticism but Mancini has indicated the Togo forward could start.

Like City, Wenger's side enjoyed a comfortable outing in Europe this week, with the Gunners comfortably crushing Shakhtar Donetsk 5-1 at the Emirates Stadium in the Champions League.

That came after last weekend's victory over Birmingham had halted a run of back to back league defeats and another win at Eastlands will confirm the Gunners are over their recent jitters.

Right back Bacary Sagna returns but fellow defenders Thomas Vermaelen and Laurent Koscielny are out while midfielder Jack Wilshere starts a three-game ban.

Marouane Chamakh will again lead the Arsenal attack and City defender Vincent Kompany is well aware of the threat posed by the Moroccan.

"Chamakh is a good player, I rate him," he said. "I've played against him once, but I mainly know him from his time in France."

"He's a top striker for a top team, so you always have to be careful."

Spanish heroes honoured

Football

AFP, Oviedo

Spain's 23-man World Cup-winning squad was awarded Friday a prestigious award but only coach Vicente del Bosque and ten players attended the glittering ceremony broadcast live on television.

The coaches of Real Madrid and Barcelona initially barred their Spanish internationals from attending the ceremony on the northern city of Oviedo because it comes on the eve of league matches.

But in the end Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho relented and allowed Spain captain Iker Casillas and Sergio Ramos to attend while Barcelona coach Josep

Guardiola allowed Xavi Hernandez to make the trip.

The seven other members from the national team who attended the ceremony came from other clubs. They included Liverpool's Pepe Reina, Athletic Bilbao's Fernando Llorente and Valencia's Juan Mata.

Del Bosque hailed the squad's "effort, sacrifice, talent and discipline" as he collected the Prince of Asturias prize for sport in the name of the entire team in the presence of senior members of Spain's royal family.

"The players who won the World Cup were faithful to these values, as well as to the values of sportsmanship and honour. By defending these values they achieved victory. It would not have been possible any other way," he added.

There were five Real players, and eight from Barcelona, in total in the Spain squad which won the World Cup in South Africa for the first time in the country's history.

Among those who missed the ceremony was Barcelona striker David Villa, Spain's top scorer in the World Cup, and the club's winger Andres Iniesta, who scored the winner during Spain's 1-0 defeat of the Netherlands in the final.

Del Bosque refused to be drawn into the controversy over the absence of key players from the awards ceremony.

"We should not demonise Mourinho or Guardiola because they did not let all the players come. I am sure they did what was possible to cooperate with the national team," he told reporters on Thursday when he arrived in Oviedo.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Spain's crown prince Felipe VI (L) shakes the hand of Real Madrid player Xavi Hernandez during the presentation of the Prince of Asturias Award for Sports at Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo on Friday.

Hyypia out for weeks

AFP, Berlin

Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen will be without veteran Finland defender Sami Hyypia for several weeks after he damaged ankle ligaments, the German club revealed Saturday.

The 37-year-old former Liverpool star sat out last Thursday's goalless draw with Aris Saloniki in the Europa League with the knock.

Although an operation is not needed, he will be out for several weeks after a scan at a hospital in Cologne revealed the injury is worse than first thought.

The Finland star last played in the Bundesliga in the 3-2 win at Wolfsburg on October 16 and his side are third in the German league before Sunday's home game against second-placed Mainz.